

Infant Therapeutic Reunification Service. Our most vulnerable infants: systems collaborating

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The Infant Therapeutic Reunification Service (ITRS) is a partnership program between the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the Department of Child Protection (DCP). ITRS provides early assessment and therapy for infants under three years and their parents, where significant maltreatment has occurred, or is at risk of occurring. The aim of the service is to make timely decisions in the best interests of the infant and provide therapeutic intervention with biological parents where possible.

ITRS is based on the model developed by Tulane Infant Team at Tulane University in New Orleans, a systemic model for maltreated infants that addresses child-parent relationships in the context of the complex social, historical and environmental factors which impact upon them.

ITRS builds capacity in the system by operating a 'case-conferencing' model involving DCP and all related services (domestic violence, drug and alcohol, accommodation and financial counselling services forming a care team around each family to offer a comprehensive public health response.

Building collaborative relationships and shared understandings across all levels of the system are essential to the Program's success, (from assessment and therapy to court processes and multi-agency support and decision making) and provides a model for ameliorating the devastating intergenerational and long-term health impacts of early abuse and trauma.

This paper will outline the ITRS Model, and discuss case examples that highlight the importance of the systemic nature of our work. A current evaluation of the service will also be referenced.